



COMMISSION ON CHILD CARE

July 2, 2020

The Honorable Sidney Katz
President, Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Avenue, 6th Floor
Rockville, Maryland 20850

President Katz and Members of the County Council:

The Commission on Child Care (CCC) would like to express our gratitude for all of the extremely hard work that members of our community and government leaders have engaged in during this exceptionally difficult time. We recognize that the work is endless, and that many challenging and important decisions still need to be made. However, *the Commission is growing increasingly concerned as there appears to be little to no communication from MCPS with the early care and education community as to the status of child care programs* (including before and after care) located in MCPS buildings.

On June 10th, the CCC sent a letter to Ms. Essie McGuire and Ms. Ramona Bell-Person (copying County Executive Elrich, Council President Katz and Dr. Jack Smith) expressing concern about the lack of information available on the status of child care programs. In this letter the CCC specifically cited the number of child care programs that are housed in/on MCPS properties and stressed the reasoning for why providers would need reopening timelines (e.g., to allow providers adequate time to communicate with families about their child care needs, to allow families time to make financial plans to pay for child care, etc.). Additionally, without having any information about the possibility of a future reopening, many providers were being forced to furlough or layoff their workforce which was adding additional economic instability in the County.

On June 24th, the CCC received correspondence from a coalition of school aged child care providers who were seeking the support of the Commission. This coalition of providers is being confronted with many of the same challenges faced by providers in Montgomery County: *the absence of information from MCPS*. Since the Commission is dedicated to raising awareness on issues involving accessibility, we believe it is imperative to share portions of the Coalition's correspondence (please see below in italics):

We write to you today as a coalition of school-age child care providers who are based in Montgomery County and serve its residents. Last year we served over 11,700 children at 85 MCPS facilities and together we employ over 1000 child care professionals. Before COVID-19 forced the closure of schools, child care centers, and summer camps, we were competitors. Today we reach out to you, united, asking for guidance and assistance.

Department of Health and Human Services

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Sidney Katz, President
July 2, 2020
Page 2

For decades, our parents and families have enjoyed a mutually beneficial partnership with MCPS and the communities it serves. We acknowledge the difficulty in returning children to school, yet we have not had any communication, specifically to us as partners, about possible plans for children returning back to school buildings. Moreover, we are concerned that, as representatives of a majority of school-aged child care providers in Montgomery County, not one of us has been invited to provide feedback or collaborate with MCPS as these plans are formulated. Childcare is a foundational service that needs to be in place for children to return to school, and for parents to return to work, and we want to be an asset to our school system in planning for a successful Fall. We implore you to let us bring our years of collective experience to the table and assist MCPS in making these difficult decisions.

In addition to requesting a seat at the table, we urgently need to know MCPS' decision making framework for reopening the schools. It takes a great deal of time, funding, and intellectual capital to develop new policies, train our staff, procure personal protective equipment (PPE), adjust our enrollment systems to meet the needs of families, and communicate all of this with the communities we serve. In order to provide the high quality of care that we have established in our programs, we need more guidance than what we're currently receiving.

To put it bluntly, without child care, parents of school-age children will not be able to return to work on the first day of school. Since being forced to close our school-based programs due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we have each taken steps to survive these closures and be able to reopen and serve Montgomery County residents when they return to work. We have applied for the CARES Act funds, we've furloughed longtime employees, and those of us with our own spaces have opened our programs for children of essential personnel. We've done everything possible to stretch our dollar, but with the razor-thin margins that child care already operates within, we're simply running out of funds to maintain our businesses until we can generate income again. We implore you to urgently pass an additional child care recovery measure for the providers that offer care in our children's schools. School age care is critical to the recovery and long term health of Montgomery County. For more than 50 years, before and after school programs have provided families trusted and safe learning environments for their children while they work. It is critical that this partnership with working families is sustained.

Many of us were excited to see Montgomery County proactively looking to assist the childcare industry through the \$10 million dollar recovery fund, but were bewildered to find it was only available for early childhood providers (ages 0-5). As we serve working families who rely on child care before and after school, there is a large population which the current funding ignores.

If anything, this pandemic has illuminated the inequities that exist across our very own county and has reinforced the need for high quality before and after school programs to help mitigate the opportunity gap and support children's academic, social, and emotional wellbeing. We all want Montgomery County to be the benchmark for how to learn from, and build upon, the shared-experience of COVID-19. We're not asking for the work to be done for us. We're asking to join you in this endeavor and ensure the long term health of school age child care in Montgomery County.

Sidney Katz, President
July 2, 2020
Page 3

As stated earlier, we recognize that there are many challenging and difficult decisions ahead that still need to be addressed; however, *child care is essential and cannot wait*. We need your support and assistance in stressing to MCPS that their delays in making decisions is hurting child care providers and the children and families they serve.

Thank you for your time and we look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michelle Belski".

Michelle Belski
Chair

c: Marc Elrich, County Executive